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ABSTRACT

The Design of Information Systems in the Social Sciences project (DISISS) of the University of Bath, England, has recently completed evaluations of three programs: (1) a library staff digest intended to inform personnel of the inner workings of the library; (2) an information system designed to assist professionals and private individuals working with young people; and (3) an indexing and abstracting service--Geo Abstracts. The assessment is done largely through the use of surveys, but cost-benefit analysis and use studies are discussed as tools to further refine the evaluation process. (SMH)

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Design of Information Systems in the Social Sciences

Research Reports
Series A no. 4

The evaluation of operational effectiveness and its use in the design of information systems

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IR 002 743

Bath University
February 1975

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PREFACE

The research project Design of Information Systems in the Social Sciences (DISISS) was carried out between 1971 and 1975 with the support of a grant from British Library Research and Development Department (formerly, Office for Scientific and Technical Information). The central team was based at the University of Bath, and assisted by researchers at the Polytechnic of North London School of Librarianship, and the Open University. The results of the research are reported in two series of papers. These reports can be obtained individually on loan from the British Library Lending Division, Boston Spa; a limited number are available for purchase from the Secretary, The Library, Bath University, Claverton Down, BATH BA2 7AY.

This report brings together in summary form the results of the three evaluation studies carried out as part of DISISS and reported in full in Research Reports B1, B2 and B3, introduces them and comments on their relevance for the design of information systems in the social sciences. The report was drafted by Mr M.B. Line, drawing of course heavily on Research Reports B1, B2 and B3, in which several other members of the DISISS team played a major part.

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1. APPROACHES TO THE EVALUATION OF INFORMATION SERVICES

1.1 Introduction

This section does not attempt to survey the various methods of evaluation or review previous studies; several excellent books and papers have been written on the topic.* Its purpose is to introduce and set in context the research carried out in this area as part of DISISS.

The recent literature of librarianship and information science contains many reports of attempts to evaluate information services. These are examples of an increasing tendency to use a management approach, and to think in quantitative terms. So general has this tendency become that evaluation, which was very rarely applied to library and information services before World War II, is now almost taken for granted as desirable. The view that library and information services justify themselves by existing has almost completely disappeared. Nevertheless, evaluation has been both selective, in the kinds of service that tend to be subjected to it, and incomplete, in that only certain aspects of a service have usually been evaluated.

Most attempts at evaluation have been applied to SDI services or specialised retrospective searching systems. These have often been based on computerised files, which have sometimes been compared with manual services. One reason for this concentration on computer-based and personalised services is that they are not only costly, but their costs are usually obvious and explicit - that is, they are not 'hidden' as part of a total acquisition or staff budget. Individuals receiving the services, librarians acting as intermediaries, and institutions in which the services are provided are all likely to be interested in knowing whether these services, which may be new or experimental, justify their cost in terms of the benefits provided; indeed, a librarian or information officer may have to justify such a service to his institution, while an individual may be paying for it himself.

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* See References: Bourne (1966), Cleverdon (1971), Katter (1969), King (1968), King & Bryant (1971), Lancaster & Gillespie (1970), and Rees (1967).

A subsidiary reason for evaluating such services is that evaluation is a practical possibility, because their users are limited in number, usually readily identifiable, and often easily accessible within a particular institution.

In contrast, information services of other kinds have been relatively neglected. These include published indexing and abstracting services; information bulletins (containing, for example, news and selected references); review journals; and informal services given personally, whether by phone, by letter, or face-to-face. Yet these constitute very significant and expensive elements in the total spectrum of information services, and difficult though it may be to assess their value or usefulness, it would seem important to try and do so.

One reason why published services such as indexing and abstracting services and review journals have rarely been evaluated is that the market may have been considered a sufficient evaluation. If such a service can survive economically, it may be argued, they have passed the essential test. There is something in this claim, in that the most needed services are rather more likely to survive, and it is unlikely that a quite useless service would last. However, there can be no guarantee that the services that a society or commercial organisation chooses to produce are the 'best' for a given need, in subject range, coverage of primary literature, frequency and currency, arrangement, or form. Indeed, since published services vary greatly in all of these factors, it is most unlikely that more than one or two approach the optimum combination. One reason for this is that little is known about what the optimum is, so that in its absence intelligent guesswork has to be used - and there is no way of assessing how intelligent the guesswork is. A more important reason is that in nearly all cases the purchaser is different from the consumer. Libraries and information units, anxious to be in a position to assist their users as fully as possible, tend to buy what bibliographies, indexes and abstracts are produced in their subject area. In some subjects or fields, there may be only one service, which therefore has a monopoly. The bibliographies etc. are then usually shelved, and are used or not used, less or more fully and less or more effectively, by readers. Published

services are nearly always kept for reference only, so that not even borrowing figures can be used as a measure of exploitation. It is true that in many small units, and in some larger ones, library and information staff use the services on behalf of their consumers, but the staff who use them are not always, indeed not usually, the staff who decide to buy them. It can therefore quite easily happen that sales of a service are quite unrelated to the degree of use it receives, and even less related to its usefulness.

Apart from the restricted range of services subjected to evaluation, the measures used have also been limited. The most common measures used have been of the precision and recall achieved by different indexing and searching methods, and from different data bases - how many items on a given topic can be retrieved, and how many non-relevant items are retrieved in the process. There are also several comparisons of long vs. short abstracts, and abstracts vs. index entries, as means of retrieving relevant items. 'Relevance' has been assessed both by users and by information specialists. Most of these evaluations have been of performance rather than of efficiency in financial terms; but some services have been evaluated in terms of cost per 'relevant' reference retrieved, usually by comparing one system with another or others. Evaluations of these kinds are most appropriately applied to SDI services.

Some services have been evaluated according to more subjective judgments by their users - how many useful references they estimate that the service has given them that they would not have received otherwise, what effect the service has had on their searching habits (e.g. time and effort saved), how much they might be prepared to pay personally for a service hitherto free, and so on. The type of approach, which may for convenience be called 'assessed effectiveness', can be used with most kinds of information service - general or personal, formal or informal. Two recent examples of this approach are those reported by Lancaster (1974), who studied and compared two highly specialised published services, and Evans & Line (1973), who assessed the effectiveness of a manual SDI service given personally to academic social scientists.

Useful as all these measures may be, information systems can only be truly effective if they are usable and used; and while it is possible to measure various parameters of an information service - such as frequency, currency and coverage - it cannot be assumed that, for example, greater frequency and fuller coverage are what users want. Other factors such as presentation, formality or informality of service may be critical in determining whether or not a service is acceptable. If users happen to prefer for their current awareness a service with low frequency or poor coverage to one with high frequency or good coverage, the reasons for this apparently irrational preference need to be sought; but before this can be done, it has to be ascertained what users do in fact prefer. On this crucial matter there has until recently been virtually no information. Nor is there much information on whether, of several roughly comparable services, some are more acceptable than others, and if so why.

In the light of the known reluctance of people to use more than one or two services, and the difficulty many experience even with those they do use, these questions are important. One of the few attempts to study them is that reported by Gould (1974), who studied preferences of users (mainly information officers and librarians) among different published indexing services; she found that ease of use and layout were high among characteristics mentioned as important, higher than suitability of subject headings, cross-references in the subject index, and several other characteristics.

Published indexing and abstracting services may be intended both for current awareness and for later retrospective searching. There may be some conflict between the ideal requirements of these two purposes, and some compromise solution may have to be sought. For example, increased frequency of issue may aid current awareness, but may make retrospective searching harder, unless issues or indexes are cumulated - and frequent cumulations may increase costs to an unacceptable level.

1.2 Measuring operational effectiveness

The three evaluation studies carried out as part of DISISS have in common that they were all concerned with the effectiveness in practice of information services - what may be called 'operational effectiveness'.

Measures of operational effectiveness can be attitudinal (likings or preferences), or factual (uses made). They can also be of individual services, or comparative. General parameters such as frequency and coverage are better investigated comparatively; it is very hard for a user to make an assessment of a particular frequency when he has known no other, and no less hard for a researcher to judge his assessment when he has made it - he may like one frequency, but that does not exclude the possibility that he would like another better. Comparisons need not be made by the same person: one individual can compare different services, or different services can be assessed by different individuals, and the assessments compared. Even with actual uses made of a service, comparisons are valuable, as providing some standard against which to measure effectiveness. It must be remembered that there is no theoretical 100 per cent out of which to mark services: all services must be judged by their relative rather than absolute performance, so that the less good can give way to the better.

Evaluation or assessment can be made of

(a) Existing (established) services
(b) New (real-life) services
(c) Experimental services.

Established services have the advantage that they have a good chance of being known and used. Experimental services can be so designed as to exhibit features which it is desired to test, and they can be offered in more than one form for comparative purposes, but it is very difficult to mount them on such a scale that they resemble a real situation, or are even professionally produced. New services are neither established nor experimental, but they may have some interesting and testable features. None of these types is therefore ideal for study; ideal studies do not exist.

One major problem with evaluating information services is that their objectives are often not clearly defined, and have to be assumed or implied. There may be a danger of measuring the effectiveness of a service according to criteria that were never intended by the producers, but in the absence of explicit objectives this is a danger that must be accepted.

Use is very much a matter of familiarity, and to be valid, comparisons should be between services that have had equal exposure to a body of users for at least two years. This condition is not always easy to achieve with existing services; with experimental services it is extremely difficult. New services can provoke antagonism from some users and enthusiastic welcome from others - both of which effects may wear off in time. Particularly if a new service has novel features (Science Citation Index is a good example), it may take a long time for users to become familiar with it and appreciate its value. Moreover, if two or more services covering the same field but in different styles, are to be compared, the same users cannot be expected to use them all over the same time period, and if they did their comparisons would not be valid. On the other hand, if they used the services consecutively their assessment of the second would be affected by their experience of the first, even if their needs had not changed during the period.

There are of course numerous other problems associated with evaluation, not peculiar to information services, but not the less troublesome for that. Any study must take place at a certain time, or over a certain period; with a certain group of users; and under certain conditions. National samples can sometimes be drawn, but even then the results cannot be extended to other countries; nor are the actual respondents always representative of the sample, especially if some effort is required of them - and any bias is likely to be in the direction of those who use and like a service. Longitudinal studies can in theory be conducted, but results are generally wanted reasonably quickly if any action is to follow. Many studies have to take place in a limited environment - perhaps only one institution - and can thus be affected by numerous special factors, though if they are replicable elsewhere this may not matter so much.

With experimental services, the effects of artificial conditions can hardly be avoided. There may be either a 'halo effect' (a warm initial welcome and a willingness to try out something new) or what might be called a 'forked tail effect' (a reluctance or inability to switch to a new system, or sheer annoyance at having to participate in an experiment) - and the two can certainly not be guaranteed to cancel out.

1.3 The evaluation of operational effectiveness within DISISS

Ways of assessing or measuring effectiveness can be categorised as follows:

(1) User ratings

A. Open - "What do you use/like, and why?"

B. Closed - "Which of x and y do you prefer/use, and why?
(x and y can be services or service parameters)

- "What do you like/not like about x?"

(2) Uses made

A. Quantity of uses - counting (of enquiries by post or phone)
- observation (of users of services)
- questioning ("how many times did you use service x?")

B. Follow-up

(i) direct - "Which references did you follow up from service x?"

(ii) indirect - "What references/information/news have you recently picked up? and from where?"

All or any of these approaches may be useful; and since they all have their disadvantages, a full attack on evaluation would make use of them all, for comparison where results were comparable, and for additional information where they were not.

As a significant part of the DISISS programme, an effort was made to study operational effectiveness. There was no attempt to evaluate indexing or retrieval performance, nor to use many other measures that have been used and reported in the literature. The DISISS evaluations should be seen as complementary to this other work, and as helping to pioneer a different approach.

Within the framework and time-table of DISISS, the amount of assessment or evaluation that could be undertaken was limited. To use the categorisation above, attempts were made at 1B, 2A, 2B(i) and 2B(ii).

These are summarized below, and described more fully in Reports B1, B2 and B3. The studies were of (i) a locally printed information bulletin; (ii) an informal question and answer service; (iii) a published abstracting service. Two of the three studies were of services in the field of social welfare; this is partly because they were small enough to make it possible to carry out a reasonably valid study within DISISS resources, partly because practitioners in the social sciences have received in the past far less attention as potential information consumers than researchers, and it seemed appropriate to redress the balance a little. The third study was much more ambitious and on a much larger scale. In this and one of the other two, the interest was as much in the methods used as in the results.

2. AN EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT INFORMATION BULLETIN

2.1 The Wiltshire Social Services Staff Digest

As noted in the previous section, few attempts appear to have been made to evaluate bulletins of this kind, and practitioners as information users have been generally neglected compared with researchers, although they are far more numerous and they can hardly be considered less important.

In this part of the research project, an attempt was made to assess the effectiveness of an existing printed information bulletin produced by a local social services department. Wiltshire Social Services Department had in March 1972 started to publish a Staff Digest, and after discussions with the department, it was agreed that the DISISS team should attempt to evaluate its effectiveness. This was done, with the assistance of the research and development group of the department, who helped to organise the survey and carried out some preliminary data analysis.

The Digest, a monthly publication, had some distribution outside the department, but was intended mainly for circulation internally. It was sent out to every member of the department. It consisted of two main sections: a news section, devoted mostly to internal matters (staff news, departmental information, notices of courses, letters by members of staff, etc.); and a library information bulletin, compiled by the County Library and consisting of abstracts of recent articles and books, all of which were available from the library. An issue of the Digest is reproduced as Appendix 1.

The limitations of this study should be noted. Only one service was studied, and no comparisons could therefore be made. The service was not costed; and no attempt was made to see in what other ways the objectives of the service could be reached. The relative cost-effectiveness of the Digest could not therefore be assessed.

The objectives of the Digest were as follows:

to present a wide range of material relevant to the staff of the department which will contribute to their sense of common purpose and satisfaction at being part of the organisation;

to clarify for staff members the nature of the work that is being carried out by the department and to outline some of the more imaginative developments;

to provide a regular source of information to staff on matters of general Social Services interest; and

to offer a forum for constructive open discussion on topics of general interest and concern which will stimulate wider appreciation of relevant issues without cutting across more appropriate channels of communication.

2.2 Survey methods; sample and response

Two complementary methods, questionnaire and semi-structured interview, were used to study the Digest. Both were subjected to pilot tests before being put to use. Of the 2,424 persons employed by the department, a random sample of 700 was selected to receive the questionnaire; the sample was stratified by type of work. 48% of those selected responded, the response ranging from 88% of professionally trained staff to 34% of home helps. The interview sample of 74 was selected mainly from persons who had completed the questionnaire; for practical reasons of travel, a few who had not had a questionnaire were included. There was a deliberate bias towards more senior staff; of the 306 administrative and professional staff, 46 were interviewed, compared with only 28 of the other 2,118. In addition to this sample of 74, six social workers in one area office were interviewed as a group, to supplement the seven social workers interviewed individually. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes; very few refused to be interviewed.

The questions asked can be divided into three categories: those aimed directly at the use made of the Digest by individuals, and its assessed usefulness; indirect attempts to assess how far the information in the Digest had actually been communicated; and background questions of possible use for future planning of the Digest, or any successor to it. The simpler questions were included in the questionnaire, the more complex in the interviews.

2.3 Direct assessment of the Digest

The questionnaire was concerned mainly with the use and usefulness of the Digest. Only 2% of the whole sample said they did not read it at all; 54% glanced at it, and 41% read it thoroughly. Administrative staff were much more likely to read it thoroughly than social workers. Nearly all staff (94%) read the news section, compared with 51% who read the library information bulletin; however, two-thirds of administrative and professionally trained staff read the library information bulletin.

Over two-thirds expressed satisfaction with the type of material published in the Digest, compared with 19% who were not satisfied (and 13% who did not reply).

The frequency of publication appeared to be about right, though a few would have liked less frequent appearance. The layout and presentation were thought a little dull by some. Both these questions would have been of more value if they had been relative rather than absolute, i.e. if the respondents had had alternative frequencies and layouts with which to compare the Digest (see section 4 of this report). The question whether abstracts were 'sufficiently informative' evidently caused some difficulty; 36% did not answer it at all, but this may be because they never used the abstracts. Abstracts might be considered "sufficient" either if they can serve as a substitute for the original items, or if they are reliable indicators as to whether the original item is worth following up. At any rate, 20% found them insufficiently informative, for whatever purpose; while 16% found them sufficiently informative, and 29% found them so sometimes. At all events, little effort was made by most to follow up items listed in the bulletin; the 48% said they "never" followed them up, and it is probably fair to add most of the 27% non-response to this figure. It is a reasonable conclusion that most users, insofar as they wanted to be kept informed of what was being published, wanted the information ready processed for them.

Some of the comments made by individuals are illuminating. For example, one interviewee said "I find the [library information bulletin] too frightening to read because it makes me aware that I do not keep up to date with the literature". And another - "Many of the abstracts are taken from material

published in America, which, although it is interesting, is not really relevant to the situation in this country". These themes - the sheer quantity of information available but unexplored, and the low relevance of most of it - reappear several times in various guises.

2.4 Indirect assessment of effectiveness

Answers to questions such as the above give a fair idea of the general acceptability of the Digest, but are of course subject to errors, especially of memory. They give a general picture of usefulness as assessed by consumers, but probably not a very reliable picture of actual use. One possible approach to studying actual use, a diary to be kept by respondents, is open to serious objections - users who were not strongly motivated to search for information would hardly be likely to welcome the keeping of a diary and those that did would tend to be very untypical; moreover, their information habits would almost certainly be affected by the keeping of a diary. Another method of studying use, participant observation, difficult enough at any time, would be virtually impossible over a widely scattered clientele.

It was therefore decided to approach the problem by indirect questions. Interviewees were presented with two news items and two abstracts taken from a recent issue of the Digest, and were asked first if they recalled having seen them, and secondly, if they had, where. 31% recalled seeing the first news item, and 11% the second. This is probably explained by the nature of the news reported in each item; the first was concerned with a dispute over the whole development plan for Wiltshire Social Services, while the second related only to Swindon. It is probable that both were seen, but only the first retained in the memory by more than a few. In addition to those who remembered having seen the items in the Digest, 45% more had seen the first item - 34% had seen it in the local press, and 11% could not specify where; while 29% had seen the second in the local press or elsewhere, and 4% could not specify where. Only 24% had not seen the first item, compared with 55% who had not seen the second.

Proportions of respondents who had not seen the two abstracts were much higher - 72% and 73% respectively. 15% had seen the first in the Digest, and 13% could not specify where; the comparative figures for the second item were 12% and 15%.

The fact that some did not remember seeing items in the Digest does not necessarily mean that this is not where they saw them. In the case of the abstracts, it is very doubtful if they saw them elsewhere. Assuming that they did see them in the Digest, it does not really matter whether they remembered the source or not, since in either case the Digest would have achieved its purpose as a conveyor of the information.

In retrospect, it would have been desirable to include several more such items in the interviews. However, this method, although limited, seems a reasonably valid and reliable way of testing the effectiveness of selective alerting services, and its wider use might be suggested.

On these results, the Digest may seem to have been of rather limited effectiveness as a conveyor of information, but a 25% recollection of abstracts is in fact not at all bad, considering that this section of the Digest was never, or hardly ever, used by some, and that others would have scanned it only lightly. The question is not merely how many saw the abstracts, but whether those who did would have seen them otherwise, and how useful it was to them to see them at all. It is difficult to see how they could have been asked their views on this last, with any expectation of meaningful answers. They could have said whether they found the information relevant in some way to their practical concerns, or of background interest to them, but its actual value to them could rarely be assessed directly. There might be a few such cases - for example, where the reader was able to act on information received in this way, and his action proved productive - but the value of information of this sort is likely to be indirect and cumulative, in providing them with a body of knowledge that may make better judgments possible.

2.5 Questions relevant to future planning of the Digest

Future planning of the Digest could be made partly on the basis of its use, usefulness and effectiveness as assessed above. This assessment does not however tell us what the Digest might, but does not, include or do. Some clues as to this are given by general questions, included in the interview, on information needs and uses, and more direct questions, in both the interview and the questionnaire, as to possible improvements.

Comments and suggestions were made very much within the framework of the existing Digest - radical changes were not proposed.

Both staff of residential establishments and home helps felt that the Digest was not really catering for their particular needs. Apart from these general feelings, comments can be divided into those on the news section and those on the library information bulletin.

There were complaints that the news was not current enough, and that most of it was already known before it was read in the Digest. Several wanted more news on local activities - on policy decisions at County Hall, on conferences and meetings to be held in the department, on area activities and residential establishments in Wiltshire, etc. Just as strong was the feeling that the Digest ought to be a vehicle for staff to express their personal views, for exchanges of ideas and developments in social welfare, and as a general form for discussion - in short, as a medium of staff participation and communication within the department.

Comments on the library information bulletin were less productive of ideas for future development. The lack of relevant material was commented on, and also the length of the section (it was not in fact long at all). One person suggested that "each issue should concentrate on particular subjects".

The background data obtained from the interviews confirmed the picture of social workers indicated by INFROSS.[1] Persons in social welfare are not closely in touch with information of a general kind, beyond their own immediate environment and problems. They recognise the potential value of some published literature, and would like to keep up with it better, but doubt whether the effort and time required would be justified by results, particularly as very little published literature would be of immediate significance to them.

58% of the sample (over three-quarters of administrative and professional staff) said they regularly read some published literature in social welfare; but by no means all of these could name books or journals they had read in the last month, and only about a third could name a specific article. This suggests that much of their reading is of a rather cursory nature, and

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[1] INFROSS (Investigation into Information Requirements of the Social Sciences); see References.

few items stick in the mind as being really significant. Fewer than a third of interviewees used the public library as a source of information, and fewer than a quarter the library of the Social Services Department. This latter finding may be significant; the department library is something to which they have to go, rather than something that reaches out to them. Numerous studies have shown that people will make only a certain amount of effort to seek for information, and staff of social service departments, scattered as they mostly are over a fairly wide area, require special motivation to use a library of this kind. It is true that they could make enquiries by phone, but they would be less likely to do this if they were not familiar with the library itself.

A quarter of the sample used reference books of one kind or another (directories, encyclopaedias, etc.); only a few used indexes or abstracts of published literature. There was the expected strong preference for informal communication, which everyone used as a channel of information, and which for some was the only channel. A few senior staff asked others to find information for them.

Very few spent more than one hour a week actually looking for information; most spent much less. The more senior the staff, the more time they spent.

Most of the information problems mentioned by staff concerned internal communication. This applied to the directors as much as to other staff. Information on the state of work in progress within the department was not readily available, and what information could be found was often not up to date. Social workers thought they were spending too much time finding information which ought to be readily available; for example, there was no comprehensive list of residential homes within Wiltshire and beyond, nor was there up to date information on vacancies in these homes. A problem frequently mentioned was the large amount of information each person received; this affected senior staff in particular. Often information was in the form of circulars and memoranda, and staff found it difficult to absorb the information circulated within the time available. The need for a better

system was commonly expressed, and some wanted help with their own personal filing systems. It is significant that few of the information problems mentioned concerned published information, or information of no immediate relevance to Wiltshire itself.

What implications do these comments have for the future of an information bulletin? Most respondents said they wanted a bulletin, though this answer would have been of more interest and value if it has been possible to ask a question or so before the Digest first appeared, so that it was possible to see whether a latent need had been called forth by the publication of the Digest. Some of the answers and comments may be applicable only to the local situation studied, but it is probable that they are of wider relevance, and of possible value to the design of any information bulletin issued by a social service department.

In the first place, it must be repeated that the Digest was read or scanned by nearly all staff, at all levels. It therefore achieved its first and main objective of being looked at. Better presentation, if this could be achieved within financial limitations, might ensure that it was looked at more carefully, but this alone would probably make little real difference.

It is clear that the emphasis of any information bulletin of this kind must be on internal information. The main need of staff is to know what is going on in their own department, and also to participate in it, by contributions and letters. The more staff are able to feel they themselves are contributing, the more they are likely to read the contributions of others.

It is also clear that, where information from outside the department is covered, it should be relevant in some way. This is not to say that it should all have an immediate application to the local situation; but most of the general developments or published literature are of some potential relevance, even if this is only in the long term, and their relevance should be pointed out.

Because most readers concentrate on the internal news, the separation of notes and abstracts of published literature from the news section might result in the information bulletin being almost entirely unread. Assuming

that some of the published information is of general value, even if only as background, to a fair proportion of staff, it would be more sensible to present it in a usable form than to exclude it or produce it separately. This could be done by highlighting certain articles of particular significance, but it would be better still if the information could be digested in some form. It would not be impossible to write a monthly review of recent literature, pulling together the threads and making some coherent pattern from recent writings, and arousing the interest more than can be done by a conventional abstract.

Although it is argued above that notes on published literature should be included in a general information bulletin, it is doubtful whether such a section would ever be read or really needed by most staff who were not administrative or professionally trained, and it might be possible to produce the literature section as an insert which could be excluded from some copies.

Producing a bulletin of the kind suggested is a demanding task. It has to be readable, as informal as possible, and yet authoritative - that is, it must not contain inaccurate information, and it must not oversimplify or mislead. This requires professional writing of a high standard. In particular, the literature section would present difficulties; because of this, and because it would be foolish and uneconomic to duplicate similar work all over the country, thought should be given to the production nationally of a monthly Digest of published literature, which could be inserted in every local bulletin. This suggestion is not inconsistent with the proposal above that general information should always have its local applicability indicated - it is very doubtful if any published work is strictly applicable to only one area.

2.6 General implications of the study

Quite apart from the future of the Digest, several other points of interest emerged from this study. In the first place, it is most important that all the emphasis should not be on published services. These fill at best a minor role, even though the role may not be possible to fill in any other way. It is impossible to say without wider study how far the comments on the local record keeping system are of general significance, but it is likely that with a growing activity the problem of keeping records is becoming greater and more complex, and some national guidance on this might be welcome.

The use of both the public library and the department library was low. In the case of the public library, this may be because it is not seen as having any role to play; if this is so, it is up to the public librarian to prove otherwise. The department library is a different question; no fixed stock of books can by itself serve a dynamic function such as is needed with a widely scattered body of staff.

The study showed that many staff, especially at senior levels, would welcome the delegation of information searching, and the handling of information, to appropriate individuals; these, whatever they may be called, are in effect information officers. It is noteworthy that in the last year or two persons of this kind have increasingly been appointed by social services departments; some on secondment from public libraries, some as research officers, some as information officers, some combining a variety of roles. It might be appropriate now to formalise this activity, not least because if it is more or less standardized from area to area, communication between areas would be very much easier, since the information officer would be able to serve as a focal contact point.

Information officers would be responsible for both internal communication and communication of general and published information. He would coordinate information coming from the department as well as information coming into it. He (or rather they - the new local authorities are almost certain to want a team rather than just one individual each) would be acquainted with the information needs of all levels and groups of staff, and, in the case of senior staff, the needs of individuals. He would have a general responsibility for the department library, and exploit its resources; he would serve as a link with the local public library. He would keep in touch with published literature, both currently and retrospectively, the latter in response to individual needs. Finally, he would exercise a general control over the filing system, and advise individuals concerning their own files.

Any personal service can only be as good as the person doing it. At its best, and given adequate resources, it can provide great flexibility, and serve needs that cannot possibly be satisfied in any other way.

A personal information officer would not be an alternative to an information bulletin. Both are needed, and they could easily be linked by making the information officer responsible for the bulletin.

2.7 Conclusions

An evaluation of a bulletin issued by one local authority clearly has serious limitations; and any conclusions drawn must be rather tentative. It is known that many information and news bulletins, of various kinds, are now produced by social service departments throughout the country. This opens up several possibilities. A comparison of different types - with varying contents, formats, frequencies, and so on - could yield useful information as to the most acceptable and attractive styles; an experiment along these lines would not be difficult to design or expensive to conduct, and would put any conclusions on much firmer ground. Following such a comparison, resources could perhaps be pooled, to save some of the searching that must now go on in several places at the same time; but, probably better, a comprehensive national data bank of relevant references and news could be built up, a bank from which each department could obtain what information it wanted, or alternatively, from which could be produced a selective list that could be circulated as part of local bulletins, as suggested above. For this to be possible, the national data bank must first be established, and ways of doing this should be explored.

2.8 Postlude

The above was all written without knowledge of any change in the Wiltshire *Digest*. In fact, there have been several important changes, which require some comment. Some dissatisfaction was felt with the contents of the *Digest*, largely because, in being aimed partly at readers beyond the Social Services Department, it could not be open and contentious enough to serve as a good channel of internal communication. As a result, the *Digest* was discontinued after February 1974. The department itself now (January 1975) issues a very informal duplicated newssheet (*The SS Mercury*) each week. This serves the internal communication purpose. Wiltshire Library and Museum Services (which, it will be remembered, had compiled the library information

bulletin part of the Digest) issues Today's News, with brief items culled from four daily newspapers (originals available on request), and Wiltshire Social Services Abstracts, a monthly selection of about two dozen articles from various journals, with long abstracts, and a list of recent books acquired by the library and thought likely to be of interest. Today's News is circulated to senior management and advisory staff, and also to Chief Officers and senior staff in other County Council departments. The Abstracts go to 90 area offices, 2 persons in each of the 54 residential establishments, and 30 senior management, professional and administrative staff, and also to 30 senior officers not in the Social Services Department.

The local newssheet appears to meet many of the objections raised to the Digest as a medium of internal communication. How much has been lost, or gained, by the separation of this newssheet from national news and notes of published literature, could be assessed only by a further evaluation study. In particular, it would be interesting to see how the transmission of information as contained in published articles has been affected.

The precise form of the changes reported above was due partly to the changes in the personnel involved. Whether a department produces a newsletter or not, and of what kind it is, depends to a great extent on the availability, ability and enthusiasm of staff to produce it; and any change in the staff involved will change its nature. This is entirely appropriate, for any local newsletter's vitality must depend in large part on its individuality.

3. A STUDY OF A PERSONAL QUESTION AND ANSWER SERVICE OF A VOLUNTARY BODY

3.1 The information service of the National Children's Bureau

It has been noted already in this report that very little attention has been paid to the information needs and services of practitioners compared with those of researchers, and very little to informal services compared with indexing and abstracting services. The previous section considered an information bulletin issued by a social service department; this section discusses a personal question and answer service run by a voluntary body.

The National Children's Bureau set up an information service in 1969, to serve its members, which include statutory bodies, professional associations, voluntary organisations, and private individuals. As part of this, a question and answer service was operated; this received enquiries by letter, telephone and personal visit, and welcomed requests for information from non-members.

The Bureau started recording enquiries from April 1970. It was hoped that an analysis of requests received would enable a picture to be built up of the matters on which persons in certain branches of social welfare (mainly practitioners) wanted information, and of the resources used to satisfy enquiries. Requests for information reach a body like the National Children's Bureau in a much rawer state than they are normally presented to a library, and in any case it is known that libraries are not used as regular sources of information by many persons in social welfare.

3.2 Form and origin of enquiries

564 of the 1,456 requests received between April 1970 and December 1972 were analysed, a random sample of 188 being drawn from each year. During this period, there was a substantial increase in the requests received: 294 in April-December 1970, 431 in 1971, and 731 in 1972. This increase does not however appear to have affected the balance of requests significantly, and accordingly the figures quoted in the following pages are for the whole period.

Three quarters of all enquiries were made by letter, and a quarter by telephone (fewer than 2 per cent were made by persons calling in at the Bureau without appointment - enquiries resulting from appointments were not recorded). 41% of enquiries came from students. The next largest proportion of enquiries (12%) came from professional, commercial and voluntary bodies, and a further 10% from local authorities.

Other users were in higher education, hospitals, schools and central government, but none of these categories accounted for more than 6 per cent of enquiries. Very few enquiries (2%) came from abroad.

3.3 Nature and subject of enquiries

16% of enquiries related to the activities, membership and publications of the Bureau, and 7% to training facilities or employment. 12% were concerned with matters such as speakers for a conference, help in planning a teaching course, lists of children's homes, voluntary societies, or grant-giving bodies, and other miscellaneous matters. There remained nearly two thirds (65%) of enquiries concerned with specific subjects.

Precise categorisation of enquiries by subject is difficult, as many overlap categories, and in any case categories can be large or small according to the level of detail used. For example, 'children in care' accounted for 5% of all subject enquiries, but if these enquiries were coded at the next level of detail, they might not be noticeable in the statistics; while if all 'handicapped' enquiries had been grouped together, they would account for 11%. With the categorisation used, only 5 subjects accounted for more than 3% of requests: child care/welfare (10%), handicapped (general) (7%), children in care (5%), and adoption and child development (each 4%). The total number of subjects coded was 100, and included such topics as adventure playgrounds, cot deaths, dwarfism, left-handedness, smoking and pregnancy, spina bifida, and toys. This wide range of enquiries shows that the Bureau was viewed as a likely source of information on virtually all topics concerned with children, and problems connected with them.

3.4 Type and form of information requested and supplied

Of more interest for prescriptive purposes than the subjects of enquiries are the types and forms of information requested and supplied. 55% of enquiries were not specific - 'any information on such-and-such' was required. When the form was specified, references were most commonly requested (for 19% of enquiries). To these may be added requests for research findings (10%), since these would be mainly in the form of references. Names and addresses accounted for 9%, statistics for 4%, and requests for films 4%. The large proportion (29% in all) of requests for references or research findings is probably largely due to the heavy use of the service by students (who, as we saw, accounted for 41% of all enquiries).

It is interesting to compare the forms of information requested with the forms supplied. 50% of all replies were given in the form of references only, and a further 4% as notes on research findings (which usually contained references). 28% of replies gave addresses - these presumably included the 9% of enquiries for names and addresses, but must also have included many of the 'any information on a topic' enquiries, and must thus have effectively passed on the enquiry to another body or person. Indirect help was given with a further 12%, mainly with requests for advice on personal problems, help with employment, and similar individual matters. 4% of replies contained statistics (the same proportion as of enquiries). Finally, 2% of replies were categorised as 'syntheses' - summaries of current information, ideas or developments on various topics.

3.5 Implications for future planning

The success of the service was shown by the large increase in enquiries received, and the variety of topics on which information was sought. Growth of demand can in itself constitute a problem, since the resources available cannot always expand to meet it.

It was the policy of the National Children's Bureau to reply to all enquirers personally. This may well have been one of the main attractions of the service, as compared with other sources from which much of the required information could have been obtained - in particular, libraries. This is especially likely to be so because of the known preference of many users,

particularly persons in social welfare, for informal and personal information services. Nevertheless, any service depending so much on personal assistance must expand its staff in rough proportion to any increase in demand if the quality and speed of service are to be maintained, and this may not always be possible.

In what other ways can a service meet increasing demand without a parallel increase in staff and other resources? In the first place, many enquirers could be directed to other resources that require little effort to use. Much of the required information could be found in a few basic reference books and collections of statistics - a shelf collection that any institution concerned with social welfare might be expected to have. Use of the local library could also be recommended; although not all public libraries are yet equipped to meet such demands, in staff or resources, few would fail to develop services quickly in response to expressed needs. An information service like that of the Bureau would thus become more of a switching centre, passing enquirers to standard sources of information - perhaps by gradual degrees (e.g. giving a first enquirer the answer to his query, but adding 'by the way, I got that from the Annual Abstract of Statistics, which you'll find in your local library').

A second way of meeting increased demand would be to standardize replies as far as possible, by producing 'packages' of information on selected topics and by using standard forms for reply. The Bureau did in fact (quite independently of this study) begin to produce a series of information sheets on specific subjects - the 'Highlight' series. These summarize research findings and other relevant information. The Bureau has also produced reading lists on various topics; these are another form of standard information package.

Undoubtedly measures of this kind would reduce the personal nature of the service, but they would enable more attention to be devoted to those enquiries which did require special personal attention, and indeed to those enquirers whose needs were more complex and practically important than those of students. Paradoxically, a rationalisation along the lines suggested might even encourage some persons to use it who would hesitate to use a service which answered every query personally.

It should be noted that a service like that of the Bureau, which can be visited in person by very few, is in a different category from that of a local Social Service Department, where an information officer can know and meet regularly many of his clients, and where the case for a personalised service is stronger.

An important issue unexplored in this study is the extent to which enquiries could have been answered fully adequately only by the Bureau. An organisation of this kind has within it a unique fund of special knowledge and skills. It may be that the informal links that already exist between such bodies are adequate to ensure that their special resources are tapped when necessary, but this may be worth investigation. When demands appear to be growing, and resources are limited, it is desirable to ensure that the best possible use is made of them, and that no unnecessary duplication or waste occurs. This may require planning at a national level.

National planning could also help to develop a programme of information packages, both reading lists and 'Highlight'-type leaflets. Each user could then build up his own collection of packages. It would be essential to keep these packages up to date, and to ensure their availability to all who needed them. Their construction and maintenance would require some machinery of coordination. But before any such machinery was set up, an attempt should be made to evaluate those packages that already exist, perhaps using some method such as that employed to assess the effectiveness of the Wiltshire Digest (see section 2 of this report).

4. A STUDY IN VARIATION OF PARAMETERS OF AN ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING SERVICE

4.1 Introduction: Optimisation of parameters of a published service

The third evaluation attempted as part of DISISS was much more ambitious than the others. It involved a complex practical experiment with an actual abstracting and indexing service, in an endeavour to assess from the reactions and uses of recipients how characteristics such as frequency of issue, coverage, etc. could be optimally combined to suit their preferences. The assumption was made that published abstracting and indexing services would continue to constitute an important part of the total information system for the foreseeable future, and that it was therefore desirable to see how the design of individual services could be improved. An actual experiment seemed likely to yield more valid results than the usual procedure of asking users for their preferences, since they tend either to choose the style with which they are most familiar, having little or no experience of others, or to ask for a maximum of everything, without any real idea of what this would be like or whether it would be usable at all.

An abstracting and indexing service has several main parameters which can be varied:

i. Breadth and depth of coverage - (a) range of journals, books, reports, etc., from which material may be included; (b) degree of selection of items from these journals, etc.

ii. Content of entry - entries may contain only the bare bibliographical details, or may include abstracts, which may themselves be of varying length.

iii. Index - there may or may not be an index, and it may be more or less detailed.

iv. Frequency of issue

v. Up-to-dateness - which obviously depends partly on frequency of issue

vi. Quality of production - which can vary from a stapled set of duplicated sheets to a professionally designed printed product.

Obviously each of these has economic aspects: increased frequency, greater depth in indexing or fullness of abstracting, broader coverage, and superior quality of production all cost more. The important question is therefore, what combination, within a given cost limit, related to a reasonable sale price, is the most satisfactory for users. Would they, for example, sacrifice quality for frequency, or up-to-dateness for depth? An alternative question would be what is the optimum combination, and what would it cost.

At present, abstracting and indexing services exhibit great variety in these parameters, but users seldom have a choice of alternative combinations within their own discipline. It is highly improbable that all the combinations that exist are in any sense optimal, and it is possible that none of them is. There is no means of knowing without experiment whether one combination is preferable to others, and if so which.

A combination of parameters found to suit one service will not necessarily be right for one in a different discipline or one aimed at a different type of user. However, an experiment with one service might produce some results so clear cut that they might be expected to apply generally, and would also test the methodology of such an experiment. In the light of the results further experiments in other areas could be made. On the other hand, there might be no clear preferences at all; even a negative finding would still be of interest and value since it would give producers a wider range within which to operate.

For a valid experiment to be set up, considerable resources were necessary. Firstly, the subject matter on which to base the experimental service had to be selected and the relevant material made accessible. The experiment required editorial and other staff, production facilities, and a means of distribution to a fairly large number of users, for a period of up to six months.

DISISS could clearly not design a new service from scratch. The cooperation of an existing service was therefore sought, the producers of which would be willing to vary the parameters experimentally over a given period.

4.2 The design of the experiment

The base used for the experiment was Geo Abstracts. This is run from the University of East Anglia under the general editorship of Professor Keith Clayton, and relies on a large number of voluntary abstracters from all over the world. From 1966 to 1972 it was issued in four sections: A - Geomorphology, B - Biogeography and Climatology, C - Economic Geography, and D - Social Geography and Cartography. At the beginning of 1973 a new section was introduced, F - Regional and Community Planning, and the existing four sections were reorganized, so that the 1973 Geo Abstracts was produced in six sections: A - Landforms and the Quaternary, B - Biogeography and Climatology, C - Economic Geography, D - Social Geography and Cartography, E - Sedimentology, and F - Regional and Community Planning. With the introduction of a new section of abstracts, Geo Abstracts considered the production of an experimental service as a desirable test to evaluate not only the usefulness of the new section, but also the usefulness of Geo Abstracts generally as a secondary service.

Each section is issued six times a year. Abstracts are grouped broadly by subject. Individual issues do not have indexes, but there are annual indexes by author and subject (keyword) to Geo Abstracts, one index volume covering A, B, E and G, the other C, D and F. Accumulated indexes to each section were published over five years 1966-70.

The objectives of Geo Abstracts can be stated as follows:

1. To bring regularly to the notice of geographers and persons in related fields, in practice, teaching and research, published and semi-published material within or closely related to their special fields of interest, by appropriate selection and listing.

2. By abstracts of each item covered, to enable users
   i. to obtain an overview of current literature in their field (without reference to the original items)
   ii. to select items likely to be of most interest and importance to them for fuller reading
   iii. to reject material that is revealed by the abstract to be less relevant than the title suggests, and in particular to identify, for rejection, material that has in essence been published before.

3. By author and subject indexes, to enable users to search for particular items or topics, currently or retrospectively.

The current awareness function is given higher priority than the retrospective searching function.

It was decided that the experimental service should be for environmental planners, and known as the Experimental Information Service for Planners. Environmental planners form a large and relatively easily identiable group of social scientists working in practice, research and teaching. The fact that the experiment was aimed at planners meant that the results would be of direct relevance to the research project, Organization of Information for Planning, being carried out at the same time at the University of Edinburgh.

For the purpose of the experiment, four parameters were used. The resources available did not permit experimentation with quality and presentation, and currency was rejected for experimentation because of the practical difficulty of exercising tight control over the times at which material was covered in relation to its original publication. The parameters studied were therefore coverage, content of entry, index and frequency. The variations used, and the codes given to them, were as follows:

1. Coverage. About 2,000 journals are scanned for Geo Abstracts; the coverage was extended for the purpose of the experimental service. Books, reports and other forms of materials are also covered. The coverage of foreign language material is restricted because of the expense and difficulty of translation. Three different coverage patterns were used for the experiment:

   P: the usual coverage of section F of Geo Abstracts
   Q: articles from "core" journals (those in which more than two-thirds of articles are concerned with planning), and main-stream books and other material
   R: material relevant to urban planning only, including material not only from section F but, where appropriate, from other sections of Geo Abstracts (especially C - Economic Geography and D - Social Geography). Examples of additional topics are urban sociology and air pollution.

The numerical ratio of items in the three patterns was roughly 25 (P): 11 (Q): 21 (R).

2. Content of entry. Three forms of entry were used:

   A: full abstracts (as for the regular Geo Abstracts)
   K: title, plus keywords taken from the title or abstract
   C: titles alone.

3. Frequency of issue. Three frequencies were used:

   1: weekly (9 issues)
   3: three-weekly (6 issues)
   9: nine-weekly (3 issues).

4. Index. Half the issues had no index (coded N), half (coded Y) had an author and subject index (the latter based on keywords from the title or abstract).

The four parameters were combined in all possible ways except that weekly issues with reduced coverage (Q) were not produced, as the number of items in each issue would have been very small. Thus, 48 styles in all were produced.

As noted earlier, any comparison of styles cannot use the same body of users, since they could not be expected to consult more or less the same materials several times in different forms over the same period, while consecutive consultation, besides involving a very lengthy experiment, would be affected by changes of interest and attitude and by novelty effects. The different styles were therefore distributed to different users, each style going to four individuals. Planners in practice, research and teaching, from a wide variety of environments, were recruited for the sample of 192.

It was originally intended that the costs of each combination of parameters should be calculated, and also that possible combinations should be worked out for several given total costs. Geo Abstracts Ltd did in fact supply costs of various operations involved in the production and distribution of the service, but it was not possible to compute from these figures alone the total costs of

the different combinations. In any case, Geo Abstracts is atypical in a number of ways: for example, it is non-profit-making, voluntary abstracters are used and several other costs are "hidden". Calculating the relative costs of abstracts and keyword-enriched titles when abstracters are not paid would not be a useful exercise. Two other non-profit-making services also supplied costs of their operations, and there were wide differences in unit costs between the three, both relative and absolute. The differences between Geo Abstracts and a commercial service would be much greater, and if costs had been incorporated, the resulting model would have been little more than an interesting example of a model.

4.3 The evaluation and its results: introduction

The evaluation was attempted in two ways. First, each issue sent out had a tear-off sheet, on which participants were asked to note items of interest, and whether, and how, these were followed up. These were to be collected and returned at the end of the experimental period. Secondly, a questionnaire was sent to each participant after he had received all the issues of the experimental service. It was hoped that the two sets of results would complement one another. In fact, while 129 (68%) of the recipients of the service returned the general questionnaires, only 105 (55%) returned tear-off sheets that were partially or wholly completed; and there was so much variation evident in the use made of the sheets and the conscientiousness with which they were filled in that they proved of less value than had been hoped. In any case, the general questionnaire contained many more items of interest.

The response rate to the questionnaire was not the same for all parameters; the extremes were 60% for the 9-weekly service and 77% for the 1-weekly. 58% of respondents were in practice, 39% in teaching, and 59% in research. There was of course a large overlap between these categories, 23% being in both teaching and research, 13% in both practice and research, 4% in both practice and teaching, and 8% in all three.

Only 24% of respondents subscribed to or used Geo Abstracts normally, and 50% did not use regularly any other information service. 64% scanned the experimental service and 24% read it thoroughly; the remainder glanced at it, did not use it at all (1%) or did not reply.

4.4 The evaluation: specific parameters

4.4.1 Frequency. Participants were asked whether the issues they received were too frequent, not frequent enough, or about the right frequency. There was quite a strong bias towards the frequency they happened to be receiving, but nearly half of those who received the weekly service thought it too frequent, while only 19% of the recipients of the nine-weekly service thought it not frequent enough. The ideal frequency would appear to be rather less often than three-weekly - this is confirmed by a separate question as to the ideal frequency, which produced a marked preference for a monthly service. Numerous small issues tended to pile up, and scanning them was found time-consuming and inefficient. At the other extreme, infrequent issues were found by some too large to wade through at a sitting, and some of the items in them had already been obtained through other channels.

4.4.2 Number of entries per issue. Varying coverage and frequency produced a wide variety of entries per issue: R1 had an average of 42, P1 of 49 and Q3 of 58; while P9 had an average of 413 and R9 of 351. 40% thought the first three had too few issues, and 62% thought the last two had too many. The optimum number appeared from the study to be between 100 and 200. It appears from the analysis that preference for frequency did not determine the preference for number of entries per issue, but preference for numbers of entries per issue may have helped to determine preference for frequency.

4.4.3 Coverage. A large proportion of respondents wanted fuller coverage - 46% wanted more journals, 38% more books, and 61% more reports. Fewer than 10% wanted less of any category. This response is in apparent conflict with the finding that users did not want larger issues or greater frequency; although in theory more journals could be covered more selectively, without increasing the number of entries per issue, this is not true of books and reports. Even in R, which had the best coverage (in a narrower field), 40% wanted more journals and books, and 72% wanted more reports. On the other hand, rather fewer users of Q, which was confined to core material, wanted more journals and books than users of P, which had the widest coverage.

Although foreign language material is covered only selectively, only 11% thought there was too little, and 36% thought there was too much.

4.4.4 Content of entry. There was a clear preference for abstracts over keyword-enriched titles, and a less clear preference for keywords over titles alone. However, only half (51%) found even abstracts completely adequate; while on the other hand only a quarter (26%) found titles alone inadequate. Some of those who received abstracts said they would have been satisfied with keywords, and a few with titles alone, but three-quarters of those who received titles alone would have preferred abstracts or keywords.

4.4.5 Index. The author index was not used by three-quarters of the respondents - in nearly all cases because they did not need to use it. However, 53% used the subject index, and a quarter of those who did not gave as a reason that it was not easy to use. There was some demand for a geographical index. The proportion of those using the index did not vary noticeably with the frequency of issues, despite their difference in size.

4.5 Satisfaction and Preferences

4.5.1 General satisfaction. 13% found the service very useful, 51% moderately useful, 31% of little use, and 3% of no use. It should be remembered that only a quarter of the respondents regularly used Geo Abstracts, and 42% did not use any service at all; 83% of the former were very or moderately satisfied, compared with 68% of the latter . In fact, previous experience did not seem to influence satisfaction. 54% said they would subscribe to the service if it became operational, but this includes some institutional subscriptions as well as personal. The same applies to a question about price; of those who answered this, fewer than a quarter would (whether institutionally or personally) be prepared to pay more than £5 (in 1973). (The 1974 subscription to each section of Geo Abstracts was £3.65 - considerably less than the price at which most of the experimental combinations could be offered, and still be within acceptable price limits).

The answers to the "satisfaction" question were related to the other questions. Satisfaction appears to be independent of format and frequency; it appears to have some correlation with coverage (P having a higher correlation than Q and R), and with the presence of an index. These differences are significant at the 10% level but not at the 5%.

Researchers and, especially, teachers were more satisfied than those in practice; this difference is more or less independent of all the parameters that were varied.

4.5.2 Choices between alternative combinations. In practice, if frequency is increased, abstracts may have to give way to rudimentary entries; there are numerous alternative combinations, which may be a matter of real choice for a producer. Recipients were asked to choose between three sets of two alternatives. It was realised that their choices would be somewhat arbitrary, and no costs were attached to the alternatives.

Two of the answers were clear-cut. The large majority (76% versus 19%) preferred a two-monthly publication with full abstracts and indexes to a fortnightly publication with no abstracts and rudimentary indexes; and a larger majority (75% versus 11%) preferred a two-monthly publication with wide coverage to a fortnightly publication with very limited coverage. The third choice was between wide coverage and no abstracts, and limited coverage and good abstracts; here roughly equal numbers (42% and 45% respectively) chose each combination, those in practice tending to favour the latter, researchers and teachers favouring the former.

4.6 Tear-off sheets

As already noted, the markings of the sheets supplied with each issue exhibited great variations and bore several indications of unreliability. Averages did not therefore mean very much, and little of value can be gleaned from the analyses.

However, there were some interesting results. Content of entry did not affect the proportion of items that were noted, but it did appear to affect slightly the proportion of items noted that were followed up. The proportion of items that were noted, and of items that were followed up, increased with frequency of issue; in fact, the actual average number of items followed up was much the same for all frequencies, although the less frequent issues were mostly much larger. Indeed, although as we have seen the three-weekly frequency was the preferred one, in this style the proportion of items noted that were followed up was lower, and the proportion of items followed up that were found useful was also lower.

A similarly paradoxical finding was that user satisfaction (see 4.5.1 above) was not related to the proportion of items that were noted, nor to the proportion of items noted that were followed up, nor to the actual number of items found useful.

These apparent conflicts between satisfaction and stated preference on the one hand, and actual uses made and items found useful on the other, can be interpreted in various ways. The very frequent issues may have been scanned conscientiously because the participants felt under some obligation to complete the sheets; in a real situation, weekly issues might be less thoroughly read. But it is equally likely that the conflict is a real one: there is no fundamental reason why people should prefer what is actually most useful to them. It has been found that users with an information problem often prefer to consult colleagues rather than use formal bibliographical services, even though they know that the chance of success is much lower with the former than with the latter. It would in fact be rather surprising if people always liked what was best for them.

4.7 More complex analyses

In an attempt to see if user satisfaction could be predicted by other factors, and which factors these were, linear discriminant and principal component analyses were used on the data from the questionnaire. These are fully reported in Research Report B3. There were no very clear results from these analyses, except that great variation appears to exist between individuals in the features they want in an information service, and that planners fall into two main groups: those doing research and possibly teaching, who want maximum coverage; and those in practice, who find compact information on core material most satisfactory. The former group is more likely to find useful a service such as the one offered. Also, those who teach and do not normally use an information service evidently find it useful. Attitudes towards the various parameters appeared to be more important in determining satisfaction than actual variations in the parameters.

4.8 Conclusions

The information and library problems of planning have been thoroughly studied by Brenda White (see References). Planning is a field with several distinctive features, both in its literature, which draws on a wide range of

disciplines, and is produced in a wide variety of published and semi-published forms, and in its users, who are spread widely over practice, research and teaching, with a fairly big overlap in activity. It is not possible from the present study to make safe generalisations about published abstracting and indexing services: a different literature and a different body of users might prove to have quite different requirements. It is however possible to make some general comments, on the method of study as well as on the results. It may be noted that, as it happens, Geo Abstracts as published does not appear to diverge greatly from the most popular pattern as indicated by this study.

The approach used in the study is believed to be a valid one, certainly more valid than the general questionnaires sometimes used to assess a single service (with no alternatives). As has been noted, a fair proportion of users of the experimental service tended to favour whatever form of service they happened to receive, and if the analysis of answers to one group of recipients were read in isolation from the rest, they could (and probably would) be interpreted quite erroneously; this illustrates the bias one can expect in studies of attitudes to one form of service only. An experiment like the present one is complex and expensive to set up and carry out, and it might be quite impossible with many data bases. It would nevertheless be desirable to conduct two or three more such experiments in quite different subject fields, and see how the results compared. Either similarity in the results or significant differences would be of interest.

Some of the questions used could have been slightly improved, and one or two might have been omitted. However, the most disappointing feature of the experiment was the use made of the tear-off sheets. It has been shown (Evans and Line, 1973) that users will return individual feedback cards to an information officer who is on the spot, and that these can yield interesting results, but it is far harder to induce users to fill in several sheets and return them by mail. Moreover, it is not possible to know how accurately those returned have been completed. Direct feedback on uses made of a service is certainly desirable, and it is difficult to think of a better way of obtaining it, but the method attempted here does not seem to be an effective one.

The finding that uses made, and assessed usefulness, did not appear to relate to expressed satisfaction is interesting and probably important. When there is a conflict of this kind, it is difficult to say which should be preferred - the user's feeling of satisfaction, or his actual utilisation of the service. It does at any rate suggest that results from studies that show high user satisfaction cannot assume to be indications of actual value - or vice versa.

The division of users into practitioners and teachers/researchers is not unexpected. This division may be much greater in other fields. Different services appear ideally to be needed for the two main groups. There were also great variations between individuals, but little can be done about this by way of published services.

There may be some difference between the preferences of librarians and of other users. For example, librarians may prefer thick issues, with wide coverage, since the greater the coverage the more the chance of identifying wanted material. Librarians would certainly prefer fat infrequent issues when searching for items in unbound parts. As libraries are the main subscribers, their views are important - it must be remembered that librarians as well as geographers are users, and it may be more effective to provide a service wherewith the librarian can serve the reader than one the reader finds convenient to use himself. It is important that producers of secondary services should be quite clear whether they are aimed at librarians or for direct use by readers - confused aims are likely to lead to an inadequate service.

If the findings on frequency* (monthly preferred) and number of entries (100-200 preferred) are applicable in other fields, how can a service such as Psychological Abstracts best be organised? Splitting it into separate publications, even if this were economically possible, might create as many problems as it solved. Classification of entries in a way that actually fitted user interests would be one obvious solution, and the question then is whether the classification does fit user interests.

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* It should be noted that anyone with a subscription to all the sections of Geo Abstracts would receive an issue every 10 days: it is only those who take one part only who have a two-month interval between issues.

It was noted earlier that the evaluation was of a current awareness service. The needs of a retrospective service might be quite different; if so, the problem is how to design an optimal current awareness service in such a way that it can be used retrospectively in due course.

Finally, no true optimisation model can be constructed without costs. The reasons why costs could not have been usefully included in this case have been explained in 4.2. In theory at least, it is open to any producer of a secondary service to allocate his own costs to the more favoured combinations, using his own data base. An exercise of this kind would be of considerable interest. In any case, the variation between the unit costs of three different non-profit-making services suggests that a detailed comparative cost study of several services could be very revealing. Any continuation of work along the lines used in the present study should certainly aim to take costs into account if at all possible.

5. FINALE

No information science research can be completely 'pure' if it is to be of practical use, since its origins will lie in practical problems, and it should have at least some indirect practical applicability. However, research can be linked more or less closely to actual situations; the closer the link, the more both research and practice are likely to benefit. The studies reported here should be regarded as early efforts at action research in information systems. The results are not conclusive, but they suggest improvements and developments that would not have been suggested by common sense alone. Further research along similar lines would, we believe, lead to better methods of evaluation and yield data of real practical value.

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APPENDIX 1

Wiltshire

social services staff digest

August 1972

Adult Training Centres

In June some centres had open days in Mental Handicap week. These were successful with Upham Road for example recording 150 visitors. Marlborough is holding its open day on 23 August (10-12 and 2-4). In this issue there are some contributions from Centres which it is hoped will provide background information and stimulate discussion on this provision in general.

DEPARTMENT IN THE NEWS

Open Day at Ashton Street Centre

The WILTSHIRE TIMES 7 July stated "The three open days ... were designed to give people a better chance to see the centre and what the trainees can achieve". The manager of the Centre, Mr. Barlow, said that the centre aimed to help the integration of handicapped people into the community through its work programme.

Ethandune

At the end of last month the Children's Home, Ethandune, was temporarily closed due to staff shortage. However, it is to be re-opened as soon as possible and this has caused comment in itself. On 21 July Mrs. Regan of Springfield Park wrote a letter to the WILTSHIRE TIMES protesting that the residents of Springfield Park and Stancomb Avenue felt trepidation about the re-opening of the home. She hoped that the Council would restrict admittance to children under 11 years of age and referred to noisy and delinquent behaviour of older ones in the past. However, the next week's WILTS TIMES carried a letter from Mrs. A. Taylor arguing that Mrs. Regan has no right to speak on behalf of all the residents of the two streets. She states ".... this household, for one, wishes to dissociate itself entirely from her remarks. Perhaps if we were all better neighbours and welcomed these children into our community they would feel less need to be destructive (if indeed they were)."

Hostels for Girls

The County Council's plans for a £62,500 hostel for eight working girls were seen as rather expensive by the Council's Finance Committee, reported the ADVERTISER on 5 July. Swindon is to be the site of the hostel.

Devizes Girls' Hostel was reported on in the ADVERTISER and BATH CHRONICLE, 5 July and twice in the WILTSHIRE TIMES of 7 and 14 July. The early articles reported on the public meeting held at Devizes Town Hall on 5 July. Grave problems are arising because problem girls are being placed in the hostel alongside unmarried motners. The Superintendent said that she was having a 'very trying time' with the irresponsible and excessive behaviour of the 'unruly' girls.

Rally for the Handicapped

Once again Wilton House was the setting for the annual rally organised by the Social Services Department. More than 1,000 physically handicapped people attended, and they and other guests were welcomed by Mrs. P. Maurice, Vice-Chairman of County Social Services Committee. SALISBURY JOURNAL of 13 July described how various voluntary groups helped with the organisation of the rally. Tea was provided by the W.R.V.S., transport by the British Red Cross Society, music by the 3rd Battalion the Queen's Regiment

Better Pay Plea for Wardens

THE TIMES ran a column on 21 July discussing the increasing demand for sheltered housing for the elderly. A report by Age Concern urges that unless Wardens' salaries are considerably higher than exist now, there will be a desperate shortage of staff. THE TELEGRAPH commented that the pay and conditions must be brought up to local authority 'officer status', and that some wardens were paid as little as £3 a week plus accommodation. There is great role confusion in the grouped dwellings practice to date, and wardens suffer from being unsupported in their work.

SPOTLIGHT

Generic Casework

Generic casework is not primarily concerned with ex mental welfare officers doing child care work, or vice versa. The objectives of the Seebohm re-organisation, in this context, were twofold. Firstly to avoid the situation where one worker with a close relationship with a particular family has to call in another worker to implement legislation concerning other aspects of that family's problems; and secondly to get away from the way ofsterextyping clients and slanting casework in order to justify a particular worker's presence, and to look at the family as a whole.

This certainly means a radical adjustment to social workers' ways of thinking and methods of working - especially those with many years of experience in a specific field. In order for the first objective to be realised workers will have to familiarise themselves with the mechanics of implementing the various acts, and for the second workers will in some cases have to look at their clients from new and unfamiliar angles.

But this is the whole object of the team structure, and it is the function of the team leader to balance the often conflicting demands of the task to be performed and the needs of the worker to transfer their skills to unfamiliar situations, and thereby achieve job satisfaction. This means in effect weighting each caseload to give the individual worker the opportunity of gaining experience in unfamiliar fields, whilst also allowing him to make use of his expertise and specialised skills.

It is surely common ground that all of us have areas of special interest, and other areas where we feel ill at ease. But it is also surely in the interests of our clients that we are able to help them with whatever problems they have from as broad a base of knowledge and skill as we are able to acquire. In the immediate situation where skill and experience in certain fields is in short supply within a particular area or team, it may well be that some workers will have their caseloads weighted too far in the direction of the unmet need in a field not of their own choice.

We should however remember that we are all presumably in this job because we want to help people, and that we all have common casework skills which enable us to provide a caring relationship for our clients, whatever the nature of their problems.

LIBRARY INFORMATION BULLETIN

This section includes abstracts of periodical articles, notices and reviews of newly published books, and details of items received by the library. Copies of all items are available from the library on request, although those marked * are not yet in stock but will be bought if there is sufficient interest. Requests should be made to Mrs. M. Rowley, Information Officer, telephone Trowbridge 4481, ext. 39, internal 726.

MANAGEMENT, TRAINING & RESEARCH

1/267 No escape from hierarchy. Malcolm Brown.
A survey of social service departments by means of a questionnaire (county councils incidentally showed the best response rate to this) indicates that the influence of modern theory has been of little account in their organisation. In the main they have a similar hierarchical structure to existing local authority departments, though 75 of the 147 departments had not appointed deputies.
Municipal and Public Services Journal. 14.7.72. pp.969-971

1/268 Leicester's Social Services
A study by P.A. Management Consultants indicates that Leicester City Council would have to find an extra £1.6m a year if it were to meet the full demand upon it for social services.
Surveyor. 14.7.72. p.22

1/269 Education and the Social Services. Sir Alec Clegg.
Excerpts from Recipe for Failure. National Children's Home. 1972.
Closer co-operation between social work departments and schools in isolating reasons for poor school performance is required. In particular, education and social work authorities should co-operate in the sphere of intermediate treatment. In larger secondary schools there may even be a need for a full-time social worker.
Social Worker. 21.7.72. p.5

1/270 Can we classify social work? Mary Marshall & Jean Munro.
The authors have attempted to evolve a classification of social problems which could compare with the classification of morbidity used by doctors. The need arose from a survey on the effects of introducing a social worker into an established general practice team but it is suggested that the classification may have wider applications as social workers' descriptions of the problems with which they deal tend to be ill defined. The scheme is set out in the article and the authors would be happy to discuss it with any social worker interested.
Social Work Today. 13.7.72. pp.2 - 4

1/271 Will medical social workers remain hospital based?
Following the critical report by the Royal College of Physicians and others on the Mental Health Service after Unification it is doubtful whether Sir Keith Joseph will press ahead with plans to divorce medical social workers from hospitals and bring them under local authority control.
Social Worker. 7.7.72. pp. 1 & 2

1/272 Regional Management Centres. Peter Holmes.
The head of the South West Regional Management Centre discussed the role of the twelve centres set up in 1971. His centre is based upon Bristol Polytechnic though some of the centres are based upon more than one existing institution. Their first function is to be a point of further growth in the region for full-time high level management education though here he sees a danger of futile competition with the university business schools. The second is to operate a wide a range of courses as possible at levels appropriate to management education. Here consultation is required between the college and organisations concerned. The third is to act as a resource centre for the further education of the region. This can only be successful if the centres and existing institutions are are willing to work together. The fourth function is to undertake industry linked research and consultancy, for which purpose a Management Training and Advisory Centre has been started at Bristol. To be really successful the centres must be seen to be prepared to help managers with their immediate problems as well as with long term planning, and the author sees the omens as fairly good.
Industrial Training International. July 1972. pp.204 - 5.

1/273 Social Work Publications
Social Workers are in danger of being overwhelmed by a flood of newsprint produced by commercial organisations. First came "Official appointments in the Social Services" and now since 26.5.72 "Social Worker". These publications are produced solely for profit from advertising revenue and advertisers should realise that their appointments advertisements will still receive a wider audience in the more substantial journals.
Social Service News. July 1972.

1/274 In-service Training. Rosemary R. Hull.
An appraisal of the role of the training officer in a social services department by the senior training officer of Cheshire County Council, begins with the suggestion that many authorities have not been courageous enough to create training officer posts at a high enough level in the organisation. Her first move was a planned programme of orientational training six months after the inception of the new department. This was aimed particularly at social workers for whom two day residential courses were run with less emphasis on work with administrative and clerical staff. It is suggested that this may have been a mistake for the anxieties of the latter were just as great as those of the former while their degree of commitment to change was understandably less. Various schemes for secondment of professional workers have been established. The training officer must tread cautiously in his relations with senior staff and must distinguish between problems which can be solved by training and those which are organisational. Also, training sections are bound to lead to expressions of frustration on the part of staff which may be misunderstood by senior colleagues. The hardest part of the task has been the establishment of priorities - the officer must decide who are the "key" workers who will have most effect upon the whole organisation and it is essential to give these workers a sense of responsibility. The main danger for a training officer to avoid is becoming too detached from the real work of the service.
Social Work Today. 13.7.72. pp.7 - 10

1/275 Social Security. Tony Lynes. Annual Report of the Department of Health and Social Security for the Year 1971. Cmnd. 5019. H.M.S.O.
Modern D.H.S.S. reports give far less information about the distribution of social security payments than this reviewer would like and than he believes the National Assistance Board and Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance did before 1965. He does not believe the occasional reports of the Supplementary Benefits Commissions on particular topics fulfil this need and more detailed information should be provided annually.
New Society. 27.7.72. p.187

1/276 The devil makes work for idle hands. Norman S. Tutt
The Protestant ethic of industry as a cure for all ills has greatly influenced our penal system and is still influential in community homes where the trade departments are supposed to fulfil the dual function of social education and the teaching of skills. But recent studies have shown that very few boys take up the trades for which they have been apprenticed in these departments, primarily because of lack of adequate motivation. A training programme designed by McClelland (1967) to raise adults' levels of achievement motivation might well be adapted for use with community school boys.
Child in Care. July 1972. pp.15 - 20.

1/277 Family size and chronic delinquency. C.H. Neville-Smith.
An investigation of sixty boys from a Community Home, comparing them with a similar group from smaller families showed the main differences to be (a) the boys from larger families had IQ's on average 9 points lower than those from the smaller ones (b) the boys from larger families had a higher proportion of 'siblings' in trouble. (c) the boys from larger families included a higher proportion residing in high delinquency areas. The author concludes that considering the enormous cost of residential care - 41 families were costing Hull £100,000 a year - a vigorous campaign for contraception aimed at the poorest groups could save much money and future unhappiness.
Community Schools Gazette July 1972 pp 184-191

1/278 Future Framework.
Following Sir Keith Joseph's recent remarks it is likely that later this year a big government research undertaking on the poverty-deprivation cycle will be announced. In the terms of the recent white paper Framework for Government Research and Development (Cmnd 5046 H.M.S.O.) who would be responsible for this, who the customer and who the contractor? An interdepartmental central government research organisation rather on the lines of the Government Social Survey on the Central Statistical Office, would have certain advantages. For example, it might introduce uniformity into the research methods of government departments and guarantee the neutrality of research workers. On the other hand it might divorce the researcher from the policy makers. It is indicative of a lack of ideas among researchers that the suggestion for a poverty/deprivation study should have come from a minister. Before the government starts to organise social science research it is time that the researchers decide upon the direction they wish it to take.
New Society 27.7.72 ppl92-193

OPERATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

1/279 Community home plan for teenagers 'in care"
An experimental community home for 15-18 year olds in care - thought to be the first of its kind in the country - is proposed to be built at Watford by Hertfordshire County Council. Each teenager will have his own room and there will be two bed-sitting rooms where those about to leave the home can learn to live independently.
Municipal and Public Services Journal 14.7.72 p.960

1/280 Necessary trends in residential care. Frank Ainsworth and N. Bridgford
New residential care units which are being opened by the social services departments will fail unless their purpose is more critically evaluated. Without planned programmes of care and realistic supervision of staff they will make the same errors as their predecessors.
British Hospital Journal and Social Service Review 22.7.72 ppl629-30

1/281 Managers All
The editorial in this issue argues that residential child care officers are not sufficiently trained in staff management which partly accounts for the alarming turnover in the staff of homes.
Child in Care July 1972 ppl-4

1/282 A personal relationship in intermediate treatment Robert Allen
Social workers concerned with intermediate treatment must be capable of developing a close personal rapport with the children. A good plan would be for a social worker to receive similar training to that given to Youth Club leaders and then to lead a group of children with similar problems from a fairly confined geographical area. He should take them on various outings, camping, swimming, museums, places of interest etc. The learning process should come from the actual opportunities arising in the course of these activities, not from any attempt on the part of the leader to inculcate moral principles. The author carried out a similar project some years ago with a good measure of success.
Social Service News July 1972 pp8-10

1/283 Social workers for birth control advice?
Pressure is growing, particularly from the Birth Control Campaign, an all-party ginger group, for social workers together with nurses and midwives to play a more active role in advocating methods of contraception among their clients. The group recognise however that more staff would be necessary for a really effective campaign.
Social Worker 21.7.72. p.1

1/284 Pre-School playgroups association gets grant
The announcement by the Secretary of State for Social Services of a recurring grant of £45,000 and a capital grant of £9,000 to the Pre-School Playgroups Association marks an important step forward for the movement. Though not large the grant is recurring. Sir Keith, speaking at the Association's local authority conference, also publicly committed himself to break the "cycle of deprivation" with which the movement is so concerned.
Official Appointments in the Social Services 8.7.72 p.8

1/285 A place of our own
The experiences of eight playgroups which have found premises of their own with help from their local councils are described. Arrangements include the use of two council houses at Winklebury in Hampshire, the erection of a purpose-built building at Beaconsfield with the help of a £2,000 loan from the U.D.C. and the use of various existing council premises - a cafe at Gravesend and a sports pavilion at Fowey.
Contact July 1972 ppll-13 and 15-16

1/286 Possuming along..... Elaine Roberts
Miss Roberts, a heavily handicapped spastic, describes in an article typed with her nose, the difference which the installation of a Possum unit 4 months ago has made to her life. This electronic gadget, which enables the handicapped person to operate a variety of mechanisms by pressure on the controls with parts of the body in which they have movement, can for example open doors, switch on lights, operate a buzzer or alarm, provide an intercom link with callers at the door or permit use of the telephone. Or it would do if Miss Roberts could actually get one installed'.
Spastic News July 1972 pp 4 and 10

1/287 Neighbourhood care and old people. David Cheeseman and others Bedford Square Press (1972)
An account of five years work in Nottingham with care groups for old people written by three social workers involved in the project.
Municipal Review July 1972 p.202

1/288 Role of the Warden in grouped housing. Age Concern 1971
An investigation into the status and conditions of wardens of grouped dwellings for the elderly showed a wide variety in salary, training, qualifications and status, reflecting a general uncertainty in local authorities about the potential of sheltered housing. The report suggests that wardens should be salaried officials with a nationally negotiated pay scale; they are definitely not merely manual workers but should receive some training and more support. On the vexed question of whether they should be responsible to the social services rather than the housing department, the working party was unable to agree.
New Society 27.7.72 ppl89-190

1/289 Services for the Elderly. National Corporation for the Care of Old People 1972
A series of short articles on the various services available to the elderly at home points to variations in the standards of service in different areas. Home helps, meals services, aids and gadgets, home nursing, chiropody and services for the

incontinent are covered. Laundry services are shown to be particularly inadequate with chiropody not much better in some areas. The ratio of home nurses to population vary greatly from place to place - Wiltshire is said to have a particularly low ratio.
Local Government Review 1.7.72 p.568

1/290 A time for understanding. Crispin Derby
Otley Urban District Council have successfully tackled the problem of persuading the elderly occupants of a group of bungalows built in the 1930's to have them modernised. The occupants were offered temporary unmodernised accommodation nearby, while the work was done as they liked to be around in a "semi-supervisory" capacity. One of the notable features of the improvements was the installation of showers instead of baths as these were considered more flexible for old people's needs. Of the original 28 bungalows the tenants of 8 originally refused to have the work done but they were so impressed by the results that they have now also opted for the improvements.
Local Government Chronicle 30.6.72. pp1110-112

1/291 Scottish concern for mental patients in the community
The 10 year report of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland "A duty to care" expresses the belief that there are many individuals in the community suffering from mental disorder who have no relatives and whose whereabouts are unknown. Even among those patients still under formal guardianship many were living in less than satisfactory conditions, a survey revealed. The Commission is strongly critical of the fact that those with chronic physical disability are exempted from prescription charges, while those with chronic mental illness have to pay.
Social Worker 7.7.72 p.3

RELATED FIELDS

1/292 "Such a very happy place"
The work of the London centre of the Spastics Society includes assessment of development in children, careers advice, providing residential accommodation for mature spastics and organising sightseeing trips of London for children. In fact the centre has become a clearing house for every type of problem faced by spastics and their families.
Spastic News July 1972 pp6-8

1/293 Croydon's 4,000 volunteers
Four thousand volunteers recently took part in "Operation Discovery" the campaign in Croydon to locate the disabled within the borough with the result that 800 previously unregistered people were added to the list. Much of this success was due to the Coordinator of Voluntary Services, Mr. Muller who previously worked for UNESCO and the RedCross. He is in the relatively unusual position of being employed both by the Croydon Social Services Department and by a hospital group, Warlingham Park. The group has been making extensive use of volunteer workers for four years.
Official Appointments in the Social Services 1.7.72 p.4

1/294 Not just the patient but the family
A recently published report by the King's Fund "Alcohol and drug dependence - treatment and rehabilitation" recommends the setting up of joint alcohol and drug dependence units in district hospitals as part of a network of hospital and community services to deal with the problem. This network should include half way houses for up to 15 people before they return to the community - these would be run by the local authority or voluntary organisations. There should also be a day hospital for follow-up work with whole families by psychiatric social workers, and further follow-up in the community by AA groups and social workers.
Social Workers 30.6.72 pp4-5

1/295 Broadmoor and public safety - the need for concern
Peter Thompson
The author - himself a former Broadmoor patient, says that the Graham Young case should have aroused a greater public outcry than it in fact did. Broadmoor he says has only three social workers and its aftercare service, such as it is, relies heavily on local mental health officers and probation officers. Yet even this he maintains is not such a scandal as the standard of care within Broadmoor. The medical staff are too few and many of the nurses unqualified, so it is scarcely surprising that some of the patients are kept too long while others are discharged too soon.
Social Services 23.7.72. pp1 and 3

1/296 MIND
Following the success of MIND week last year, the National Association for Mental Health is to organise a similar week this year from 22-28 October. The campaign's two aims are (1) to increase public awareness of and sympathy for mental ill health and (2) to provide a place to live and somewhere to work if possible, for all mentally ill and handicapped people.
Education 14.7.72. p.30

DO YOU REQUIRE BOOKS OR INFORMATION?
If so, you should contact the Information Section at County Library and Museum Headquarters (Trowbridge 4481 ext.39, internal 726.) A collection of books, periodicals and pamphlets bought for the Department is kept at County Library Headquarters. Any titles not in stock will be obtained for you. Do not worry if you do not have the exact details of the publication - librarians are experts at tracing bibliographical details. You are kept informed of recent books and articles by the Library Information Bulletin in this Digest. These items can be supplied in full if requested. There is no need for you to have a large collection of reference works in your offices. All you need to do is pick up the telephone or write a short memorandum, and you will have the information you require. You may, for example, require the address of an organisation, or any recent books and articles on a certain topic. The Library can supply this information. Collections of books selected from the Social Services Collection will be distributed to the area offices to facilitate browsing. Members of staff are also invited to visit theHQ of County Library at any time Monday to Friday between 0830 and 1730, to choose books.
If you would like further information concerning this service and how to use it, please contact the Information Section.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Animals in Area Offices! (11) John

SARUM CENTRE

Sarum Centre was opened in December 1963; it is one of five adult training centres run by the Social Services Department of Wiltshire County Council. The other four are purpose built and situated at Trowbridge, Swindon, Chippenham and Marlborough. Sarum Centre was formerly an Isolation Hospital and ore result of having adapted premises is the spaciousness of both buildings and grounds.

The Centre takes trainees from Salisbury and the southern area of the county. One of the costly problems faced by a rural authority is the daily transporting of trainees to training centres. Few can travel by public transport and special arrangements have to be made for private buses and, in the case of remote villages taxis to convey trainees to and from the Centre.

There are, at present, 75 trainees aged from 15 to 66, a manager, 6 instructors, 2 kitchen staff and a caretaker. One of the trainees is employed part-time as a cleaner. The usual age for admission is 16 and there is no upper limit. Inevitably the initial admissions represented a very wide age range but the most intensive training is undertaken with the younger age groups whilst the more mature trainees are given opportunities for developing their preferences and abilities in a variety of simple and useful occupations.

Mentally handicapped people are divided legally and for administrative purposes into two categories - subnormal and severely subnormal. In terms of I.Q. roughly 75-50 and below 50, but I.Q. does not measure social competence and temperament which are equally important in assessing trainability and motivation and the resulting prospects of eventual employability. The majority of children with I.Q's above 50 are educated in schools for the educationally subnormal whilst those below about 50 attend the former Junior Training Centres which, since April 1971, have also been administered by the Education Department and classified as special schools. Many trainees at the adult training centre have attended these schools. Others, having secondary physical handicaps such as spasticity, epilepsy, deafness or poor sight, have attended schools for the physically handicapped. A small proportion have remained in ordinary schools and others, having spent some years in institutions, are now able to benefit from the provision of local authority hostels, such as Sarum House which is situated in the same grounds as the training centre and a few have had little or no previous training outside their own homes.

It is now widely accepted that real work situations are possible and desirable and that mentally handicapped people should be accorded the dignity and courtesy due to any other adult. Gone, we hope, are the days when they were spoken of and treated as 'eternal children'. They respond to demands - real demands - being made upon them; they must be given responsibilities, encouraged to develop initiative, and given opportunities to make decisions and express their opinions. Of course they will put forward ideas which they have picked up from someone else - but don't we all do that most of the time? They need opportunities of helping others who are in some way less fortunate, thus fulfilling their own basic need for approval and appreciation. We all need to feel appreciated and useful, how much more must this be true for people who may have a subconscious feeling of inadequacy and inferiority.

Every effort is made to help all trainees master the essential simple skills of everyday life and attend to their personal needs. By the time they are ready to attend the adult centre the basic skills have usually been learnt but there is likely to be a long way to go in developing maximum independence. In some cases parents find it very difficult to allow this, and, like all parents, remain over protective towards their own children.

Training in the work situation, whether in the industrial, carpentry, needlework, or rural crafts sections consists of developing the potential of each trainee to the greatest possible extent. This of course cannot mean preparing everyone for eventual employment although this is the specific aim wherever possible. Many factors influence the likelihood of a trainee being able to become self supporting apart from intellectual ability. Such things as the availability of suitable jobs, the tolerance and understanding of employers and work mates, the trainee's own personality traits and the ability to make a sustained effort in a work situation.

Work is one of the most important aspects of training and the needs of the trainees predominate with production rates and financial returns of purely secondary importance. We do not train for specific jobs although if a trainee has an aptitude in a particular direction an effort is made to place him in a similar job

Prior to placing trainees in employment a more demanding work situation is created They are expected to give up most recreational activities and to work under pressure for long periods, thus experiencing, in a familiar situation, some of the stresses they are likely to meet outside.

The variety of work available teaches many different skills and helps a trainee to adapt those already mastered, get on with his work mates, give and take, accept, understand, and carry out instructions and if necessary to accept criticism. He also develops powers of concentration, general awareness of himself and others in a social situation and of the acceptable behaviour required of him as an adult learning the importance of doing his work to the best of his ability without constant supervision. Perhaps one of the most important aspects is the effect work has on individual trainees in helping them to feel a sense of achievement and of being needed. This can be emphasised in many ways; by insisting on time keeping, through contact with the firms providing work, by inculcating a sense of urgency over a job "because it has to get to London Airport by tomorrow morning", by discussing "this order for Russia" or "that lot for Japan" by 'pay day', by encouraging parents and others to talk of 'going to work' NEVER, of course. 'going to school' - and by encouraging the trainees to explain their work to visitors.

However, this is not sheltered employment; wages are not payable and trainees are eligible for Social Security benefit. Transport and mid-day meals are provided without charge and a small weekly payment of between 25p and £1.50 is made to each trainee. The amount paid to trainees, whilst it bears some relation to the amount earned by the Centre, is not based directly on this. Firms are expected to pay the rate for the job for all work undertaken by the Centre and it is quite incorrect to assume that the Centre is self-supporting. In fact, we do little more than recoup cash payments to trainees.

Social Education

Social training is also of tremendous importance, and in a sense takes place throughout the whole of the trainees' day. The inability to recognise the rights of others, behave in a responsible way towards the opposite sex, accept and carry out instructions, tolerate work mates or use leisure time is more likely to cause a subnormal person to fail in a work situation than inability to do a carefully chosen job. The kind of social know-how automatically developed in a normal youngster must be systematically taught to one who is subnormal.

Incentives are valuable in the training programme and encourage sustained effort; pay increases, production records and special badges all have their place.

Social education classes are held daily for selected trainees. About 24 of the younger trainees in 3 graded groups receive one hour's tuition daily in addition to which a fair amount of

tuition is given to individuals or very small groups. It is not felt desirable to 'spread the jam' too thinly however by attempting to run educational classes for everyone.

Many trainees are unable to read and the majority find number work extremely difficult. Even those who can attain a reasonable speed in a work process or can use initiative in a practical situation may find abstract reasoning extremely difficult. Education in such cases has to be confined to the most basic skills, for example telling the time, handling small amounts of money, using a telephone and recognising a 'social sight vocabulary' consiting of common signs the understanding of which is essential if acutely embarrassing situations are to be avoided; 'no smoking', keep left', 'stop', 'no entry', 'ladies', 'gentlemen', etc. Some trainees take many months to grasp money up to 5p and others never manage this. Even those who can tell the time find it difficult to understand that catching a 'bus at 1.45' means that one must reach the 'bus stop before a quarter to two'. Having learnt such things in the classroom, trainees progress to carrying out simple assignments in the town, travelling on public transport, shopping, using Post Office facilities, visiting the Labour Exchange, collecting a doctor's prescription, making enquiries, crossing the street, finding their way to a given destination, using a cafe, telephoning from a public call box etc. Initially the assignments are carried out with the instructor who gradually withdraws increasingly until eventually trainees can carry out a number of tasks entirely on their own, first in groups of three and finally entirely alone. It is sometimes most encouraging to see the rapidity of progress and development of self-confidence, particularly amongst trainees who have over-protective families.

A centre shop is run by trainees in order to give them practical experience in reckoning small amounts of money and giving and checking change. We try to discourage the purchase of too many sweets and to introduce the sale of fruit and small personal items such as tights and toothpaste. Trainees are also responsible for collecting and recording tea money and marking the daily registers. It is planned to start a savings scheme shortly.

Short courses are arranged in such subjects as decimal money and safety for selected groups of trainees and from time to time discussion groups are held.

Housecraft

Cookery classes take place every morning, up to 4 trainees thereby having a 3 hour cookery and housecraft session each week. All female trainees have a 1½ hour needlework class weekly and selected groups are taken for courses in hygiene and self care. In addition special classes are arranged twice weekly to enable some of the senior men to learn to wash, mend and cook simple snacks in order to help them become increasingly independent.

Other aspects of training include the development of a sense of responsibility and all trainees are expected to undertake certain tasks in connection with this. A monthly centre meeting is held and attended by all trainees and staff including caretaker and kitchen staff. This helps to encourage everyone to feel they can make suggestions and participate in decision making and the general running of the Centre. The chair is taken by a trainee volunteer and the majority of trainees take an active part in the meeting.

Voluntary Service

The centre also has a voluntary service group. Members help in luncheon clubs and Homes for the elderly. Eventide the Cathedral, and in various money raising pursuits in order to give them opportunities of helping other people.

Hobbies

There is a monthly hobbies group and a weekly gardening session for those who are interested. A silver cup is awarded annually for the winning garden. Theological students organise a weekly dancing session for the younger trainees, students from the College of Sarum St. Michael organise tennis, netball and rounders on the college playing fields for a selected group of girls, and football and cricket matches are arranged from time to time for the lads. Older trainees have a weekly discussion over a cup of tea in the staff room every Friday afternoon which helps to compensate for the fact that most classes and activities are geared for the younger people.

Social Club

Mention must also be made of the very successful New Horizon Club run by members of the S. Wilts. Society for the Mentally Handicapped, assisted by grammar school pupils, in the Social Services Department in Salt Lane.

Holidays

Trainees have the opportunity of an annual seaside holiday sponsored by the local Society and run by Centre staff and voluntary helpers. The party has stayed in holiday camps, hostels and hotels and benefit, not least, in developing independence and in mixing normally with other people. A recent innovation has been the holding of a holiday competition for which a second silver cup has been donated.

During the past nine years a variety of experimental activities and ideas have been introduced at Sarum Centre. The process of development goes on as we aim to bring out the fullest potential of every trainee to enable each to lead the happiest, fullest and most useful life within his individual limitations. Above all, we aim to have a HAPPY Centre; as one of the instructors said nine years ago, quoting from Pearl Buck, 'Happiness first, all else follows'.

Miss M. E. A. Dickson

Horticultural activities at Sarum Centre

MARLBOROUGH TRAINING CENTRE - Reflections after twelve months

We opened in September 1971. Buildings and equipment were brand new and incomplete. Additions as they arrived were welcomed with glee. Carpentry on dining tables without vices or clamps was tricky and it was a major event when the benches came in time for our official opening in January. A circular saw that was not fastened to the floor was like a circus act. The sewing machines reacted to the pedal like a 'ton-up' motorbike.

It has been interesting to see the trainees reactions to working with machines for the first time and we are pleased with the results. We have lads now able to operate with confidence circular saws, handsaws, planes, drill, sander and mortiser and skill with hand tools has greatly increased. Sewing machines have been tamed. We have been doing work for two or three firms in the town but still maintain private orders for stools tables etc. which are in great demand. Our aim is to give as much variety as possible to trainees and staff. The intensive work in the Further Education classes is giving good results. Marlborough town is fast becoming used to our shopping expeditions and shopkeepers and others are most helpful. Our kitchen is now supplying meals on wheels to old folk in Marlborough, Aldbourne and Pewsey and we have inaugurated a branch of the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children.

To round off each week, the last half-hour on Friday is devoted to special events which have included "Yippee" (our own form of Bingo), "Opportunity Knocks" and discussions on a multitude of subjects.

At first we were surrounded by derelict land but we now can look out over a large area of infant grass, across fields of barley to the forest of Savernake. This was the site of the old railway station and we are mindful that one day we may expect a ghostly steam monster to roar from the tunnel - we have of course booked our seats!

L.T. DOWNS

ASHTON STREET CENTRE, TROWBRIDGE - Eric or a Little Talk to your Conscience

Years ago, in the reign of Queen Victoria, many books were written, largely, OF COURSE, about the activities of the educated classes. As most of our smug and insular ancestors were extremely narrow-minded - as we can prove for ourselves by looking into a mirror, their doings were controlled by the accepted attitudes of their day. Mind-washed bigotry, old wives tales and all the other biased conveniences of the social education so insidiously ingrained in the Englishman of that time. Is it any different now?

We gather from our reading - those of us who can read - that "Lady Jane" knew many people. Possibly when she became more enlightened she regarded the villagers in her husband's manordom as people .....! Very often she knew them as they measured up in her selfish little life. So that fellow was the carpenter and that female person was the dressmaker and that ungrateful scamp was the snivelling little wretch who delivered her ladyship's vegetables whatever the weather. Once a year, perhaps, if the weather was not too inclement she was moved to pay a visit to a local almshouse where she disposed of her surplus food and cast-off clothing. You will quite sympathise that her compassion could not be expected to extend to the mad-house it being well known that such places were not for ladies. Are you recognising yourself? Therefore it is refreshing to be able to report that the impoverished inmates of the Social Services Headquarters are finding that the aristocrats of Ashton Street Adult Training Centre are so graciously inclined towards them in that we undertake to fold into three and insert into ordinary common envelopes several hundred copies of the Social Services Staff Digest. However, let it be known to all and sundry that the many-channelled enterprises engaged in by us at the Centre extend to many things. Have you been to see us to find out for yourself? Limited, hampered, handicapped as we are we can still be useful, productive members of society. What limits us? What hampers us? Is it you?

Do you still think of us as certain indefinable creatures kept out of sight behind a high blank faced wall? Do you still give a knowing little smirk when you see us in the street? Do you comfortably turn away when we stumble and splutter about simple everyday things. If we do not know left from right are you going to show us? Would you rather think of us as possible subjects for kindly euthanasia? Do you really think that you are all that much different to us?

If you prick us we bleed. If you shun us do we not feel it? If you condescend, we know! Please get to grips and stop giggling about our problems. Our problems are yours and you helped to create them!

What can you do to help? Well get going, get involved, ask, find out, pay us a visit. Give us work to do - work that is within our powers - just the same as the work that has been given to you to do is within your powers. Send us teachers, some of us can't count, we are 'hopeless at gardening' well give us a gardening instructor. We cannot articulate properly. So give us a speech therapist, investigate the structure of our mouths and tongues, have patience with us. We know that we have been allowed to become round-shouldered, we have institutional postures but then did you see to it that we had a remedial gymnast? You had teachers, instructors, tutors, club leaders, the lot. We need the same but we need it more than you - that is the difference!

R. BARLOW

FROM THE AREAS SALISBURY

Trouble with accommodation!

'To those with a Little Extra'

From time to time it is necessary to bring to the deprived or those in danger they are in fact so.

With increasing alarm it is noted the constant and continued infiltration of the female sex into areas that have been regarded, by tradition as unquestionable male territory. This subtle, but calculated infringement with view to threaten the natural superiority of man has entered a fearful phase, namely the diabolical impingement and complete disregard of that name plate 'MEN'. Is nothing sacred anymore? Are there no 'decent' standards prevailing anywhere ?

You will be aware, gentleman reader, that the historical sanctuary of the Church is no longer available to those who need respite. As you aware the sanctity of the Men's Loo is no longer inviolable? There is no where we can retire and be convinced we are 'safe', nowhere is left for serious contemplation of life. Are you aware 'they' use our Loo?

It is hoped that upon reading the implications noted here you will give a few moments consideration on possible retaliation. After all it is not without some basis of truth that womans place is in the kitchen or bedroom, certainly not this particular room. I am sure nobody other than a few insecure persons would even consider that statement needs debate.

Not only are we, as children, subject to deep seated emotional trauma via potty training etc., it now seems possible we Men are 'at risk' as adults, liable upon entry into second childhood to undergo basic psychological difficulties that could be traced back to being subjected to Loo difficulties while employed by Wiltshire County Council Social Services Department.

Germaine Greer has done untold damage to some environmental pleasures in life, womon's lib should be restricted to going bra-less and/or 'other'less.

Perhaps one way of dealing with the problem is to assist females to comply with Germaine Greer's philosophy by going 'other'less.

Perhaps a ban of say two to three days by us men would be appropriate.

K. DOUGLAS

NOTICES

Shaw House is holding a Garden Fete on Saturday 2 September at 2.30 p.m., proceeds to go to the amenity fund.

Southfield's Garden Fete and Open Day is on 23 September, organised by Devizes Lion's Club to be opened by the Director; proceeds will go towards the purchase of a colour T.V. for the residents.

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

The 'Spotlight' article on the Rent Guarantee system and the invitation to comment on it was of great interest to me. I hope there will be further opportunities to analyse and discuss systems and procedures in the Department.

The author states that a 'straightforward, regular system of rent collection is important. For weekly paid workers, or those receiving DHSS allowances it is essential for them to be able to pay their rent weekly, though it may be administratively economic for an authority to collect rent fortnightly or monthly. Housing authorities vary greatly in the responsibilities they take in helping their tenants to be ' good tenants'; some make it very difficult. Some warn tenants if two or three weeks arrears build up, others leave the arrears to accumulate to a level that inhibits the tenant from any constructive activity. Some alert the Social Services while arrears are still small, others not.

Is there not an opportunity for our new Department to advise local authorities on the optimum procedures regarding the extent of arrears to be tolerated, the efficiency of prompt issue of warnings of notice to quit, and the best system of rent collection? This would seem particularly apt now, with the future formation of larger, more remote but hopefully more efficient, District Authorities.

My second observation is that the present system operates in fact as a means of placating housing authorities rather than of supporting tenants. Perhaps the basic issue is that housing should be a Social Services concern, but an immediate problem is that many local authorities insist on the confidentiality of Rent Guarantee s. What do neighbouring tenants on the estate feel when they know a family is heavily in arrears with rent and no action seems to be taken? What effect does it have on tenants to see their arrears building up whilst no action is taken by the housing authority? Would a better system be a loan on behalf of the tenants to the local authority, to be collected by a marginal increase in the weekly rent.

The Rent Guarantee system is intended to safeguard a family while casework efforts are made to improve their attitude toward rent payment. With the present pressure on Social Workers, would not the loan system be a more efficient use of resources?

M.C. Newman, Social Worker

STAFF NEWS

COMINGS

TROWBRIDGE AREA

Mr. E. Cowan, Warden, Rutland House
Miss T. Maren, Housemother, Sampford Place
Miss C. Brett, Peripatetic Housemother
Miss M. Powney, Peripathetic Housemother, Starfield
Mrs. M. Hopkins, Housemother from night attendant, Starfield

CHIPPENHAM AREA

Miss S. Swan, Housemother, Kingsmoor
Mr. R. Nichol, Social Worker

SWINDON AREA

Mr. D. Daniels, Social Worker } completed training course
Miss M. Mitchell, Social Worker } and joined Department
Mr. & Mrs. R. Teteris, Superintendent & Matron, Pinetrees
Miss N. Hall, Deputy Matron, The Close
Miss C. Searle, Housemother, Olive House
Mr. & Mrs. G. Davies, Assistant Officers in Charge, Cedars
Mrs. S. Blumsden (nee Miller) has left Orchard House on the occasionof her marriage and joined Olive House as a part-time Housemother.

DEVIZES AREA

Miss A. Jeffery, Team Leader, Marlborough from Social Worker, Swindon

SALISBURY AREA

Mr. R. Collins, Deputy Superintendent, Orchard House
Mr. R. Whines, has rejoined the department for a short time.

Congratulations to members of staff who have successfully completed their training courses:

Trowbridge	Devizes
Mr. R. Shapland, Social Worker	Mr. T. Collier,
Chippenham	Superintendent, Southfield
Mrs. J. Gericke, Social Worker	
Swindon	Salisbury
Mr. R. Bolton, Social Worker	Miss M. Burt, Social Worker
Mr. P. Prout, Social Worker	Mr. A. Greener, Social Worker
Mr. R. Frith, Social Worker	Mr. J. Teller, Social Worker
Mr. J. Morgan, Social Worker	Mr. D. Burchell, Sarum Centre

New arrivals

Mrs. M.S. Grey of Ashlea, Trowbridge, gave birth to a son, Stuart, on 19 July.

To Kay and Gillian Mottram (Salisbury) a son, Sherwin, on 22 July.

POSTSCRIPT

An invoice received_

Dr. County Council of the Administrative County of Wiltshire;

Carrying out repairs to Matron's Instrument which had been dropped - Standard charge £1.90.

Handwork Price List 1972 - Marlborough Adult Training Centre,

Teapot stands	35p	Nursery chair (seagrass)	£1.80
Coffee Tables	£3.00	" " (polycord)	£2.05
Long Stools (seagrass)	£1.80	Coathangers	50p for 10
" " (polycord)	£2.30	Milk bottle holders	50p each
High Stools (seagrass)	£1.50	Penholders	5p each
" " (polycord)	£2.00	Wine racks (6 bottles)	50p each
Footstool (seagrass)	£1.25	Dishcloths	7½p each
" (polycord)	£1.50	Peg bags	20 p each
		Firewood 3 bundles	5p or 20p per bag
		Cribbage boards	25p each